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RUEHGI/AMEMBASSY BANGUI 1286
RUEHDK/AMEMBASSY DAKAR 1247
RUEHKH/AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM 0376
RUEHLC/AMEMBASSY LIBREVILLE 0956
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 1614
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SIPDIS

SIPDIS, SENSITIVE

DEPARTMENT FOR AF/C and AF/PD, LONDON AND
PARIS FOR AFRICA-WATCHERS

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: PRESIDENT DEBY CELEBRATES 16
YEARS IN POWER WITH FORMER REBEL LEADER
NOUR AT HIS SIDE

¶1. (SBU) Summary: President Idriss Deby Itno celebrated the sixteenth anniversary of his successful coup d'état (December 1, 1990) at the annual day of freedom and democracy, held this year in the southern town of Kyabe, in the Moyen Chari region of Chad, on December 29. Representatives from the diplomatic community flew to the event in a French military transport plane. The President delivered a short address to a muted crowd, saving his surprise for the end, when he welcomed the presence of former rebel leader Mahamat Nour, seated just behind him, with whom he had signed a peace agreement on December 24. Of particular note was the large military presence at the event, and the very subdued local crowd. End Summary.

¶2. (U) Each year President Deby Itno selects a different town/region in Chad to host the festivities marking his ascension to power in 1990. For the 16th day of freedom and democracy, Deby chose the remote southern town of Kyabe, some 100 kilometers east of Sarh, near the CAR border. The planning for the festivities is a year-long process, as the government puts together and begins infrastructure projects in the chosen town/region. For Kyabe, this included the construction of 27 small villas sitting along the main road into town.

¶3. (U) The event was billed as a celebration of President Debys accomplishments. As in previous years, the he President invited virtually every diplomatic mission to participate, and invitees from the diplomatic corps were flown to the event in a French military transport plane. Other official invitees were flown to Kyabe in a jet operated by the national Chadian airline, Toumai, while still others traveled the 700 kilometers by road. The official invitees, including diplomats, ministers, political party members, regional governors, and high-ranking members of the Chadian military, numbered close to 500. Although difficult to estimate, the military presence was

significant, perhaps as many as 800 soldiers. Several diplomatic invitees commented to the PAO that they observed the military presence to be far greater than in previous years, with many more weapons, including some tanks and other armored vehicles, openly displayed. Between 500 and 1000 locals attended the speech and parade.

¶4. (U) In their introductory speeches, the head of the organizing committee and the governor of the Moyen Chari region both showered praise on the President, thanking him for all he had accomplished in the region and for the nation. Both also mentioned the efforts of the regime in Khartoum to destabilize Chad. The president took the podium and delivered a ten-minute address. His main focus was on national social welfare projects: universal health care, universal free education, tax-free building materials for infrastructure projects; and local development efforts: the villas (27 built, 30 more promised), bridges in Moundou and Kyabe, and a new regional airport. The President turned his attention to the East, accusing Sudan of continuing to support the mercenaries that seek to destabilize our country. He then assured his audience that no mercenaries remain today on Chadian soil. Joining President Deby Itno on the podium was rebel leader Mahamat Nour, with whom the President had recently signed a peace agreement. The President acknowledged Nours presence, thanking him for his decision to work for peace, and encouraging other rebel leaders still active in Eastern Chad and Sudan to follow Nours example.

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¶5. (SBU) Comment. PAO attended both this years and last years events, and some of the contrasts were striking. Last year in Fada, deep in the heart of his ancestral Zaghawa homeland and with five months left before elections, the President was both visibly more at home and in campaign mode. His speech in Fada lasted nearly an hour, and elicited loud rounds of applause and ululations from the audience, including local residents. After the speech in Fada the President took a long victory lap atop his armored Hummer, followed by a large and colorful parade organized by local and nomadic peoples attending the event. This years audience was notably subdued: no applause at all from the local population, even during the translation of the speech into the local language, and very little noise or applause even from the official participants. Rather than a victory lap, the President jumped into his vehicle and departed, bringing the event to an abrupt end. Diplomats were fed lunch, brought to the Presidential compound for very a very cursory handshake with the President, and were back on the plane to NDjamena by 14:30. End Comment.

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